



Think arranging your rooms according to an age-old Chinese system is too out-there for you? Think again. There are plenty of elements in this practice that are completely down-to-earth (and don't cost a cent). **Feng shui master and interior designer Catherine Brophy** shares her best tips for making every room in your house feel calm and happy.

this is your home on feng shui

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OBJECTS OF YOUR AFFECTION
Meaningful items in a neat, uncluttered display are a hallmark of good feng shui.

What exactly is feng shui?

CATHERINE BROPHY: It's a practice based on the idea that our homes are a mirror of what's happening inside us. The purpose of feng shui is to get your environment in alignment with who you are and where you want to go—to harmonize your energy with your home's energy.

How do you do that?

By carefully considering what you bring in, how you arrange your rooms, and how you maintain the place. Everything has energy, even inanimate objects. Feng shui helps guide that energy and let it flow freely through your home.

Let's talk living rooms and start with the basics. Where should the sofa be?

Against a solid wall—ideally, the wall farthest from the entry—with a clear view of the door. Leave a few inches of breathing room between the sofa and the wall.

If you don't have a wall to put the sofa against, how can a floating sofa work?

Put a console behind it, topped with tall, sturdy lamps, so you feel more secure. Add a mirror opposite the sofa so you can see behind you. That makes you feel protected.

What's the biggest feng shui mistake you see in living rooms?

An awkward seating plan that's not conducive to conversation, like if the couch is 10 feet from the nearest chair or all the seating is pushed up against different walls.

How close should seating be?

There's no formula, but you want an intimate arrangement that invites people in. Furniture should be close but not jammed together. And each seat needs a surface on which to rest a drink or a book. That makes it more welcoming.

What about flow?

In general, you shouldn't hit any furniture as you go across the space. For example, it's not great to walk into the back of a sofa as you enter the room. And if there's a walkway into another room, it has to be clear.

Tell us about coffee tables.

A square or rectangular table may not feel as good as a circular or oval one, which less energy move around more easily. You don't want harsh angles pointing at people.

So circles are good?

For a coffee table, yes. But, overall, a mix of shapes is important. Squares represent earth; rectangles, wood; triangles, fire. Round and oval items represent metal. The living room will feel most balanced if it includes all of them.

Do you have to cover living-room windows?

That's up to you. Some people love looking outside and seeing life go by; others feel invaded. But if you have a big window opposite the front door, the energy can fly right out the window, so it's good to address that. Use drapes or blinds. Or put something in front of the window, like a plant or a pretty reflective bowl, to bounce energy back into the room.

What if you like uncovered windows but your view is of a brick wall or your neighbor's rusty swing set?

You can use sheer curtains to soften the view and divert attention. I'm not a big doodad person, but for an unpleasant sight line, you could hang a crystal in the window to redirect the energy. Any clear, multifaceted crystal will work.

Please don't say that we can't have a TV in the living room.

In feng shui, there are private (yin) spaces, like bedrooms, and public (yang) spaces, like living rooms. A TV in a public space is OK. A television often becomes the focal point, which is fine if that's what you want. But if the intention of the room is, say, to gather the family, then keep the TV in something closed or in a less-central spot on the wall, so it doesn't dominate. For a family space, it's also nice to have a soft ottoman in place of a coffee table, so the kids can be in the center of the action.

What else do you think about when you use feng shui in a living room?

Shedding light on dark corners. Lighting activates energy, so have enough light sources that each area of the living room can be well lit when in use. If areas are in the dark, that represents neglect of certain aspects of your life. [See *The Eight-Point System of Feng Shui*, page 100.]

Anything to know about color?

Rich, saturated colors are great in public spaces; red is particularly invigorating. Deep blue and eggplant are also energizing.

What about the little details?

It's important to surround yourself with beauty and items with meaning.

Doesn't that create clutter?

Not if you pare down to the things you truly love. Weave them into a bookshelf, and let the collection grow with your life, editing before you add anything new.

What's one instant living-room trick?

Move a favorite item to a prominent spot. When you walk into the room and see something that brings you joy, you, in turn, will send joy back into the space.

On to the dining room. What are some common feng shui issues?

Having a dinky table in a cavernous space. Or too big a table in a tiny space, so once guests are seated, they feel locked in. You want plenty of room to pull out chairs with enough space behind for people to pass.

What else?

General neglect. Some people's dining rooms are a dumping ground for mail, kids' stuff—just a mess that never gets cleared. And in some homes the room is totally ignored; no one ever sets foot in there. This depletes its energy, which makes it even less appealing. If you don't often use the room for meals, activate it in another way. Put a plant there so you're forced to come in and water it. Or bring your laptop in and use the space as an office.

Let's talk about the decor.

The dining room and the kitchen are where we take in and process nutrition; they're critical to healthy functioning. So the dining room's decor shouldn't be out of left field—way more formal than the rest of the house, say. It should reflect who you are.

Crystals are feng shui-ish, so is a crystal chandelier best?

If a crystal chandelier works with your overall style, it's great. But also consider reflective metals, like nickel, brass, or bronze. If you have a lot of other reflective surfaces already in the room, like mirrors and metal sconces, warm wood or linen can make the space feel calmer.

Anything to avoid?

Fixtures that point straight down, targeting all the light into one spot. They focus all the energy in one place, rather than highlighting the abundance of the entire table. Ambient light is inclusive, whereas spots are exclusive.

Is a dining-room rug a feng shui requirement?

It's an individual choice. In feng shui, rugs are grounding; a rug makes a dining room feel more intimate and encourages conversation. But if you have kids, a rug might not be practical.

Does the "round table" rule apply here?

Rectangular or square tables are OK in the dining room because, even though they have corners, no one will be sitting in front of a point, as they might with a coffee table. But if a circular or oval table fits perfectly, it's an excellent choice. Natural materials, like wood, feel solid and warm. The sound of glass hitting glass can cause tension. And people get overly protective with glass tables—anything too precious brings on nervous energy.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

A neglected dining room is a feng shui no-no. If you don't eat in the dining room often, use it for game night, homework, or crafting.



What about the windows?
Dress them, but you don't need anything heavy. You can do sheers. No one wants to feel exposed here.

Where should guests sit?
If you watch people walk into a waiting room or a restaurant, they choose a place where they feel safe—with their backs to the wall. It's nice to let dinner guests sit with a wall behind them, as opposed to an open doorway or windows.

Any magic feng shui props for this spot?
A nice, big mirror reflecting the table is said to double the abundance and bring good fortune.

Mirrors are significant in feng shui. Why?
They can do all kinds of tricks, like recirculate energy and enhance natural light. They draw attention to what they reflect, so if a mirror has an unpleasant view, move it. Hang mirrors high enough that seated guests aren't stuck looking at themselves.

Let's move to the bedroom. Overall tips?
It's best to have an interplay of masculine and feminine details.

What do you mean?
For example, a bed that feels solid but sumptuous, maybe a wood bed frame that has an upholstered headboard. Or gorgeous silk drapes paired with a straight roman shade. This contrast ensures that the room feels balanced, energized yet restful.

Where should the bed go?
Ideally, the head of the bed is on the wall farthest from the door but not directly across from it. Feet pointing directly out the door is known as the coffin position, because it's how the dead are removed in China. A sidewall is also OK—but no matter what, make sure you have a clear view of the door.

What if you're stuck with a layout that demands the coffin position? Yikes!
Put a settee or a high bench at the end of the bed that's slightly taller than the mattress, or place an upholstered screen between the foot of the bed and the entry to shift the energy.

Can one side of the bed be against a wall?
It's OK for kids. But for adults, leave space on both sides. Think about how both people feel in the room. Each should have adequate lighting and easy access to the bed without climbing over the other person. If you're single and looking for a partner, leaving space on both sides of the bed is energetically beneficial.

How do you get that calm, feng shui feel?
It's a combination of safety, with an enveloping bed; coziness, with soft materials; and symmetry, with table lamps and nightstands that create a bookend effect. The bed feels like a little room within a room.



(Your front door is somewhere on this wall.)

the eight-point system of feng shui

Each spot in your home is associated with a different aspect of your life. Here's a beginner's guide to cultivating positive energy in every zone.

Stand inside your home with your back to the front door.* Look forward. The part of your home in the far left corner is the money sector. The far right corner is the relationship zone. Got it? You work the magic by placing certain items in certain zones; some have symbolic power, others a literal connection to the area. The eight-point system is intricate and layered; feng shui expert Catherine Brophy offers an introduction, with quick tips for stimulating each sector.

MONEY: Place fresh flowers or a jade plant here. This is also a good spot in which to keep cash or a valuable treasure.

REPUTATION: The place to display awards, accolades, and good-luck symbols, like four-leaf clovers.

RELATIONSHIPS: Bring in pairs (especially potent are lovebirds, butterflies, and cranes) or an image of two trees intertwined. If your living room is in this area, place a love seat, a pair of pillows, or two matching chairs here.

CHILDREN AND CREATIVITY: Ideal for a bulletin board or a craft or sewing zone. If you don't have kids, use this spot to indulge your inner child with bold wallpaper or chalkboard paint.

FRIENDS AND TRAVEL: Nice for funny, playful photos, artwork made by pals, or a map that reminds you of a favorite trip (or a journey that you hope to take).

CAREER: This area should be as well lit as possible. If it falls around your entry, hang a bright pendant or chandelier. Put something here that relates to your

passion and/or your job. A scientist might want a quotation from Einstein. If you play music, keep your instrument here.

KNOWLEDGE: Create a reading nook or an intimate spot for conversation. If you meditate, this is a great place for it.

FAMILY AND HEALTH: It's really important to keep this area clean. (You know, if you don't have your health...) And it's the perfect spot for a family-photo wall.

* This map applies not only to each floor of your home but also to each room. Stand in the doorway to orient yourself and get a handle on which corner is which. If your room has more than one doorway, use its main entrance.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS
A fireplace seeds energy in a home; a mirror above the mantel sources energy back in. Circles (here, on the mirror's frame), which have no beginning and no end, symbolize the flow of the universe. In feng shui, pairs (such as the vases and the dogs on the mantel) represent love and nurturing.



ILLUSTRATION BY NIKOZIO



SAFE HAVEN
A feng shui bedroom feels comforting and secure. The bed is key: Here, the wings of the headboard "hug" the mattress. When your eye is drawn up, it's said to elevate your mood. So hang an overhead fixture that you love, paint the ceiling a calming color, or mount striking drapes up high.

It seems like there are a lot of rules about the bedroom.

It's hard to rest with too much active energy around you. You have to be aware, for example, of what electricity is running behind your bed. Try to minimize it with a battery-operated alarm clock instead of an electric one. Turn off your phone at night and keep it out of the room. No laptop or computer near the bed. An hour before you go to sleep, stop looking at it.

What about lights plugged in behind the bed?

That's tough to avoid. But keep lighting soft—unless you read in bed, in which case you can have good, focused lights on your nightstands.

Is it true that you shouldn't store anything under the bed?

Right. Stuff under the bed sends out energy all night long. The bedroom is a private space, and it's important to honor that. You need to protect your bed.

But what if you have no storage space? Live minimally.

Assuming no TV in the bedroom?

It's not the best. Bringing a public thing, like a TV, into a private space disrupts your energy. If you do have a TV here, just make sure it's not a focal point. Maybe keep it in a cabinet.

So to review, we're looking at flow, layouts, lighting, and clutter-clearing for each room. This feels like a lot.

How do we even start?

Sit in a room, close your eyes, relax, and breathe for a minute. Try to determine how it actually feels to be in the space. Open your eyes and slowly look around as if you've never seen the space before. Try not to label things, like Bill's chair or Aunt Elma's painting. Just look and consider: Is there room to move freely? Is one side of the room much heavier? Is there enough light in the corners? Does anything drive me crazy? How does the color make me feel? Note anything that feels off. Then make a list of adjustments to tackle one at a time, at your own pace. Feng shui is like life. It can be directed and guided but not forced.

Page 96: Rindchen wool rug, [alchome.com](#); Silk dupioni pillows in pomegranate, [michelevarian.com](#); Page 97: Large gold crumpled vessel (on top shelf), [michelevarian.com](#); Page 99: Medallion dining chairs in white cotton by Zentique Furniture, [kayagrace.com](#); Page 101: Woody floor lamp, [boconcept.com](#) for info; Page 102: Torsion wool rug, [alchome.com](#); Cylinder lamp by Garrison, [artemians.com](#); Silk dupioni pillow in pomegranate, [michelevarian.com](#). For information on other items in this story, see Credits (page 134).

These pages: Interior design by Catherine Brophy and Erin Fearns. For more from Catherine Brophy, visit [thefengshuidetective.com](#).



if you do only three things...

1 | clear clutter

Mess is the number one enemy of feng shui. Dead or uncared-for piles sap your home's strength and block positive energy from entering. Most significant is entryway clutter, so deal with this first. Next up, any clutter at the center of your home.

2 | fix or toss broken things

They're impediments to vitality. Toss chipped plates, burned-out bulbs, and clothes with holes. Repair stopped clocks, clogged drains, teetering chairs, and loose cabinet pulls.

3 | clean the windows and oil the doors

In feng shui, the windows are the eyes of a home, and the front door is its mouth. To bring clarity to the space (and to yourself), maintain them, making sure that they open, close, and lock well.